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HOW LONG  
HAVE YOU BEEN SICK ?

THE SOLDIER'S LEGACY.



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# HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN SICK?

## THE SOLDIER'S LEGACY.

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ARE you *sick*, my friend? *How long* have you been so? For a month or a *year*? That is a long time. But I can tell you of a man that was sick a longer time than *that*! Have you been sick for *ten years*? Oh, what a time to have been ill! But I can tell you of one who was longer sick than *that*! Have you been sick for *twenty years*? Oh, it makes the heart sad to think of anyone being ill for twenty years! And yet I can tell you of one who had been ill a longer time than even *that*! The man, of whom I speak, had been sick for "*thirty and eight years.*" John v, 5. Poor man! How long he had been ill! We are not told how old he was. But if he was sixty years of age, he had been ill ever since he was twenty-two years old. Reader, think of that. Are *you* as badly off? Have you been sick as long as that poor man? But whether you have been sick a long time or a short time, it is *God* who sends your sickness, and he knows how long it ought to last. If you please, you may say, "O God, I should like to be well!" but then you must add, "Not my will, but thine be done!" And you must also desire to have *your sins forgiven* still more than to have your body cured. What a mercy! The doctors cannot always cure the body, but Christ can always heal the soul.

The sick man, of whom we read, "*had an infirmity.*" He had lost the use of his limbs! he could not walk.

Only think! Not to have walked for thirty-eight years! To have lain upon his bed for all that time! Why, any man that was thirty-eight years old might have said, "Ever since I was born, that man has never walked!" Oh, reader, how little we think of our mercies! Every morning that we get up, ought we not to say, "Thank God, I am able to walk?" How many are laid upon a sick bed all day long! How many are never able to walk abroad and breathe the fresh air! How glad they would be if they could only walk! Reader, if *you* are too sick to walk, or have met with an accident that confines you to bed, think of the poor man that had an infirmity for "*thirty and eight years!*" Sick people have great need of patience. Oh, it is very trying to the sick! Oh, how we long to be well! It makes us very weary, and often very sad. Oh, yes, we *do* need patience. And *who* is to give us patience? Who but *God!* Look to *Jesus*. Look to His Cross. Look to His precious blood. Say, "Lord Jesus, forgive my sins, and give me patience to bear my trials!"

Did you ever hear of the *Pool of Bethesda*? John v, 1. It was at Jerusalem, in the sheep market. At a certain season, an angel came down from heaven and troubled the water, and then the first sick person that stepped into the water was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. This was God's doing. It was not the water that cured the sick persons—it was the mighty power of God. And so there is a pool—a precious fountain, in which sinners may wash away their sins. Reader, do you know what that fountain is? It *is the blood of Christ*. Only one sick person could be healed at a time in the Pool of Bethesda. Perhaps the angel did not return again for a whole year, and then no one else could be healed. Not so with the fountain of Christ's blood. As many as like may come at once.

Oh, reader, if you could come and bring all your family—if you could bring the whole village—the whole town—if you could bring all the state with you—nay, if you could bring the whole world—there would not be one too many. Jesus would not say to one of them, “I cannot save *your* soul.”

Now, the sick man was lying by the Pool of Bethesda. There were many others there, all waiting for the angel to come down and trouble the water. Each of them thought, “Perhaps I may be the first to step into the water, and then I shall be made whole.” Jesus saw the poor man lying there. Jesus knew how long he had been sick, for Jesus knows all things. He knows how long *you* have been sick. He knows what is the matter with you. He knows what remedies you have used—what doctors have attended you. He knows every pain and ache that you have had. He sees you lying upon your sick bed, as He saw the poor man lying at the Pool of Bethesda. Yes, Jesus sees you. Do you look to Him? Do you feel His presence? Do you love Him? Do you *believe in Him*?

But what said Jesus to the sick man? He said, “*Wilt thou be made whole?*” “What a question!” you say: “to be sure he wished to be made whole.” If Jesus asked *you* that question, you would say, “Oh, yes, Lord, I wish to be well as soon as I possibly can. I wish never to be sick again.” Hush! my friend. God knows that you are sick. He knows that you desire to be well. You cannot be sick a day longer than He appoints. If it is really good for you, God will take your sickness away in the right manner, and at the right time. If He were to say to you, “*Wilt thou be made whole?*” should you not say, “Lord, do with Thy servant as seemeth Thee good. Not my will, but Thine be done!”

The poor man answered, "Lord, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool, but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." How sad! Perhaps he had been to the pool for eight and thirty years. How often he had been carried there! How often he had been carried back! How often he had been disappointed! Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. How sick his heart must have been! Perhaps he was beginning to despair. Perhaps he had said that very morning, "If I am not cured this time, I will not go again."

What did Jesus do? Did He put the man into the pool? Oh, no! Jesus did not need to do that. He could cure him without the water of the pool. Jesus said, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked." Ver. 8, 9. What wonders Jesus can do! What a poor, helpless object the man had been—always lying upon his bed—not able to stir for "*thirty and eight years*." But look at him *now*—he is able to walk and run! Look at him *now*! They used to carry him on his bed—now he is carrying his bed on his back! Who would ever have thought to see him walk again!

Reader, again I ask, "*How long have you been sick?*" *Five* days, or months, or years? *Ten* years? *Twenty* years? Alas! your *soul* has been sick longer than that, unless Jesus has made it whole. As long as you have lived your soul has been sick. It was *born* sick. It has *remained* sick. It will be sick while you *live*, and sick when you *die*—yea, sick *for ever and ever*, unless Jesus Christ make it whole.

"*Thirty and eight years*" was a long time to be sick. But what is that compared with eternity? To be "*thirty and eight years*" in pain! But is it not worse

to be in *everlasting* misery? To be "thirty and eight years" with a hot skin and a feverish head! But, oh! what is that, compared with everlasting burnings "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?" Mark ix, 44. Oh, reader, may that never be *your* portion! May your sickness make you see your need of a Saviour! May it bring you to the feet of Jesus! Then, in due time, shall you see that good land, "where the inhabitant shall not say I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." Where "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." Such shall be the portion of all them that *believe in Jesus*. Isa. xxxiii, 24. Rev. xxi, 4.

The sick man was made whole *at once*. Immediately he received strength. How was this? Because he *believed*. He knew that Jesus could do it. Therefore, he was made whole. Had he not believed what Jesus said, he would have been a cripple still. So is it with sick *souls*. The soul that believes in Jesus is saved *at once*, forgiven *at once*. Poor sinner, only believe this simple truth, fix your eyes in true faith on the cross of Christ, and your sins *are* all forgiven.

There were *many* sick folks at the Pool of Bethesda. Why was the impotent man the *only one* whom Jesus healed? Because he was the only one that *believed*. Thousands saw Jesus when he was upon earth; but few *believed* on him, and only few were *saved*. Thousands hear of Jesus *now*—but few *believe* on him, and only few are *saved*. How many go to church and hear Christ preached, and yet how few *believe*! How many read the Bible, and yet how few *believe*! How many say their prayers, and yet how few *believe*! Reader, do *you* believe on Jesus? Is *your* soul saved?

And *why* did the impotent man believe? Because

*God gave him grace* to do so. And, reader, if *you* are to believe, you too must have the *grace of God*—"for by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." Eph. ii, 8. Then pray for the *grace* of God. Be not happy till you have *grace*. Look to Jesus that you may have *grace*. Pray for the spirit that you may have *grace*. Oh, reader, by all means have *grace*!

But what if this sickness, and these pains and wounds, should be unto death? With this grace death is gain, and dying is but going home. You have fought your last battle. You have met your last enemy. You have finished your course; and with your last breath you can say, "Oh, death, where is thy sting! Oh, grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God who giveth me the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the evening of the 5th of November, after the fight of Inkermann, there were many killed and wounded within the enclosure formed by the tents of the British troops. The number of the Russians was very great. The English had been able to withdraw their men, and they helped the French in attending to their soldiers who had fallen in the battle. Here and there men carrying stretchers went over the field of battle, seeking out the survivors and carrying them away. Just as one of these stretchers, borne and escorted by soldiers, preceded by a woman with a lantern, came toward a pile of bodies fearfully mutilated, a voice feebly exclaimed, "My friends, come to me." It was a young infantry soldier, who had been terribly wounded, and was near breathing his last. "You would not be able to carry me hence. I feel my last moment draws near; but I am glad to see friendly faces before I am quite insensible. There is one great kindness I want you to do for me; I trust that God will preserve

one of you to accomplish it." Then catching sight of the woman he said, "Oh, my friend, God will preserve you to fulfil this commission. You will go to my mother, you will console her, for women know best the words wherewith to bind up the wounded heart. You will tell her that her son died as a soldier, but above all, say he died as a Christian; you will take her this New Testament given him by a stranger at the port from which they embarked, which has changed a bad fellow, a swearer and a profligate into a new man; it has shown him the abyss in which he was plunged; it has shown him the way of salvation by the grace of God, through faith in the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; it has been a strong support in days of trouble, and in his last moments it has given him confidence to appear as a pardoned sinner before God. You will find my mother in the market-place at Paris. She will have already received the fatal news, and will be in the greatest grief; but you will give her this message of peace; you will read it with her; you will give my loving farewell to all my family; and Isidore Briche thanks you for it, and entreats you to join with him in his last prayer."

The hardest or most sceptical heart cannot refuse the last request of a dying man. And these soldiers, who had no doubt faced the dangers of that day without flinching, fell on their knees near Isidore; the woman had put her arm under the soldier's drooping head, and he appeared to rally a little. "O God," said he, "thou who art supremely good and powerful; thou who hast taught me to pray, vouchsafe to comfort my mother; enable her to forget the errors of my youth; make her know thee as I know thee; grant that my brothers and sisters may walk in thy ways; preserve these kind people whom thou didst send to me, when I besought it of thee in faith; preserve them from the misery of living

at a distance from thee; guide this woman in the work I have committed to her. And now, my God, I thank thee for having opened to me the gates of life; may thy blessing rest on those Christians who give thy holy word to the soldiers, and on those also who bring it to our very camps, where I have had the happiness of meeting them. I render thee thanks for thine infinite goodness."

He was silent, and the pale light of the moon shone on his face, which, although changed, was quite radiant with heavenly hope. He was mentally praying; his strength was diminishing. The soldiers were sad and silent, the woman in tears. The dying man seeing this gently addressed her, "You will remember my name; and if not, it is written on the first page."

"Oh, I know your mother; she it was who received my child when I was obliged to part from him, before we left."

"It is God who has ordered all this my friend; I was not aware of this act of my mother's; it does not surprise me, for my mother is so kind."

He was again silent; his features betokened extreme pain. The sergeant, Robert, drew near and said: "I will write to-morrow to Mrs. Briche; she knows my handwriting, so that she will not be startled; thus, she will gradually learn the sad news, and on our return, if God brings us back to our child, we can finish the work of consolation you have confided to us."

"Thank you, sergeant; when all is over—you will take the book; for I will keep it to the end—which cannot be far off. Stay near me with your wife—your companions can go—their kind services are of no use to me—perhaps further on they may be able to help others."

On a signal from their leader, the soldiers withdrew,

and Robert knelt down close to his wife, that he might help her to support their young friend. Blood soon after came from the mouth of the dying man. He became more and more faint. In the last moment of consciousness he feebly murmured: "Pardon — my mother—grace—mercy—God."

His head then sank, and he was gone. The young woman bent over him and took from his hands the Testament which he still held tenaciously in his stiffening fingers, that it might accomplish the object of the dying soldier, in carrying the glad tidings of salvation and consolation to his bereaved mother.

Similar cases have occurred among our own soldiers. Poor P—— had suffered for several days, and when he was told that he must die, he assured those around him that death had no terrors for him. He bid them say to his family, that "all was well with him." He called for his Bible, and as his own eyes were too dim to read, he asked one of the attendants to read for him those favorite passages in the psalms and gospels, from which he had drawn comfort in days past. Words of rapture and admiration burst from his dying lips as he caught new meaning and saw new power in the word of life. The sick of the hospital left their pallets and drew near the dying man, that they might hear his last words, while tears streamed down cheeks that had not been wet with them for years. A simple head-stone, neatly cut, and evergreens planted near his grave, are the touching tokens of a fellow-soldier's love.

Brave and beloved soldier, may the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in sickness, in suffering, and in dying. AMEN.

## CASTING OUR CARE ON THE LORD.

- 1 When struggling on the bed of pain,  
And earth and all its joys are vain,  
How sweet, my God, to know thy power  
Sustains me in this trying hour!
- 2 How rich and precious sounds that love,  
That tells of rest and joys above,  
And lulls my troubled heart to rest  
Upon my blessed Saviour's breast.
- 3 There, still, while life's warm currents rush,  
My soul would all her sorrows hush,  
Nor ever yield to dark despair,  
For light, and life, and peace are there.
- 4 Helper and Hope thou ever art,  
To heal the wounded, broken heart;  
O! let me hear thy pardoning voice,  
And bid my broken bones rejoice.
- 5 Then shall my cheerful, grateful tongue  
In rapturous strains thy praise prolong;  
My ransomed soul adore thy grace,  
And swifter run the heavenly race.

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